DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 468 330 EA 031 882

AUTHOR	Dare, Aaron
TITLE	Charter Schools in New York: A New Era. Civic Bulletin.
INSTITUTION	Manhattan Inst., New York, NY. Center for Civic Innovation.
REPORT NO	Bull-23
PUB DATE	1999-12-00
NOTE	9p.; Edited version of remarks delivered at a luncheon (New York, NY, September 30, 1999).
AVAILABLE FROM	Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, 52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017. Tel: 212-599-7000; Fax: 212-599-3494; Web site: http://www.manhattan-institute.org. For full text: http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cb_23.htm.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Charter Schools; *Community Action; Elementary Education; Nontraditional Education; *Parent Attitudes; *Parent Empowerment; *School Choice
IDENTIFIERS	*Albany City School District NY; Urban League

ABSTRACT

A successful charter school does more than educate and train children: it unites a community. That is the keynote of this bulletin, an edited version of remarks delivered at a luncheon by one of the founders of a charter school in Albany, New York. It describes the process of creating one particular charter school and the lessons learned from the process. The process involved interviewing and gathering support from parents in the community dissatisfied with their local school district. Input from parents resulted in the creation of a framework complete with goals, benchmarks, and meaningful expectations. With such a framework, the founders of the school applied for a charter with the state of New York. Within 10 days of their application being approved, they had registered some 850 students to fill 550 slots. The principal lessons gained were: (1) facilitating change is difficult; and (2) sometimes one cannot wait for change but must act to institute it oneself. (Contains a list of reports and bulletins available from the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research.) (WFA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 468 330

Civic Bulletin

No. 23 December 1999

CCi
CENTER FOR CIVIC INNOVATION
AT THE MANHATTAN INSTITUTE

Charter Schools in New York: A New Era

Aaron Dare

Aaron Dare is President and Chief Executive Officer of the Urban League of Northeastern New York, Inc. and Founder of the New Covenant Charter School in Albany, N.Y. This is an edited version of remarks he delivered at a luncheon in New York City on September 30, 1999.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. BARREIRO

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

EA 031 882

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Civic Bulletin

No. 23 December 1999

CENTER FOR CIVIC INNOVATION
AT THE MANHATTAN INSTITUTE

Charter Schools in New York: A New Era

Aaron Dare

Aaron Dare is President and Chief Executive Officer of the Urban League of Northeastern New York, Inc. and Founder of the New Covenant Charter School in Albany, N.Y. This is an edited version of remarks he delivered at a luncheon in New York City on September 30, 1999.

I am very fortunate that much of the credit surrounding the founding of the New Covenant Charter School in the Arbor Hill neighborhood of Albany has been attributed to myself. However, the true founders of the school are the parents, and it is their story that I would like to share with you.

It is the story of a community coming together and developing a vision for public education that is based in principles like quality, opportunity and universal access. Many of us have had the good fortune of being able to take these notions for granted. In many urban communities like Arbor Hill, people cannot afford such luxuries.

Two years ago I had the opportunity to meet and speak with some of the consumers of one of our state's largest business concerns. We discussed the inferior services the business provided and they told me that while the cost of the services grew at a much greater rate than inflation, the business continued to provide a depression-like return to investors. The business promised high quality services, but it provided acceptable levels only on the margins, the outer limits of its trade areas, where the consumers were much more organized and had greater options available to them. *It performed at acceptable levels only in those areas where it was forced to because of greater levels of competition.*

When emergencies occurred and services were called into question, the business's response time was slow and the repairs that were made were shoddy at best. The new products that were introduced to replace outdated ones consistently fell short of even the most modest expectations.

As the costs associated with services increased, the company explained that quality would quickly follow. The consumers had every reason to believe these claims, especially as they saw the improvements in the outer trade areas. The quality and the improvements that were promised, however, simply never came.

When the consumers met with the business's governing body to express their frustrations and concerns, they were met with entreaties of, "Wait: We are doing the best that we possibly can. Please be patient and we promise we will do better."

Again the consumers waited patiently because they truly believed in the organization's mission. But instead of the promised improvement,

EA 031 882

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

the business continued to perform poorly and introduce poorly conceived, unresponsive products and services.

When the consumers again turned to the company's board of directors, they were met not with pleadings, but accusations. The board told them that they were "not ready" for the services. Their expectations were unrealistic, and the resources available to the company were simply insufficient to make any progress.

The consumers were told that "change takes time." The board was committed to change, but it wouldn't come quickly.

These consumers explained to me that they felt the services were poor because of their street addresses, and because they could not afford to move, they had no other true alternative.

Why should a discussion of the failures of traditional public education in inner cities be perceived as an attack on the institution and its professionals, while ignoring the failures is never seen as an abdication of responsibility to our children?

Because of my background within the banking and telecommunications industries, I was familiar with the issues that the consumers were raising. Their complaints were quite standard, but this time we were not dealing with banking or telecommunications. Instead, we were talking about public education: the billion-dollar industry that was designed to serve our children. An industry which, in our inner cities and poorer communities, I am ashamed to say, had lost its way.

I say this without assigning fault or blame. That is not my purpose, though it is amazing to me that we as a society are not outraged by the well-documented failures that we have seen, not only in test scores, but on the nightly news, on street corners and in prisons around our state and nation.

Worse than this is that we have been made to feel there was something wrong with acknowledging this failure. To do so in many circles was even seen as an attack.

We were instead encouraged to understand and accept an intractable link between poverty, race and low academic achievement. It is true that many chronically low-performing schools share common threads; they have concentrations of poverty and minorities. This link is visible, but why are we so willing to *accept* it as a causal theory?

Additionally, why should a discussion of the failures of traditional public education in inner cities be perceived as an attack on the institution and its professionals, while ignoring the failures is never seen as an abdication of responsibility to our children?

Where is the commitment, and whom exactly is it to?

These parents, the consumers that I spoke of, like millions of other New Yorkers, dress each morning for work, some preparing for two jobs. They send their children to school faithfully, fulfilling one of their primary and most critical parental responsibilities. They trust that the system that they help to finance, *and want desperately to believe in,* will fulfill its responsibilities as well.

When they drop their children off each morning, they remind themselves of their own school experiences. They hope that their children's will be different; that their children will realize dreams of becoming doctors and lawyers and making a difference along the way.

They hope that their children will become contributing members to their homes, schools and communities.

My fifth grade teacher, an incredible educator, had a saying that stood above her door. It said, "Enter this hall to learn, depart it to serve."

These parents understand this message. They have lived it. They pray with every fiber of their beings that through education their children's plight will be better than theirs. I can assure you that in communities like Arbor Hill there is not a more pressing obligation. When frustration and despair are constants at every turn, and optimism is buried in broken promises and unrealized potential, hope is hard to come by. But when you do find it, it must be clung to for dear life.

This hope is steeped in the belief that education has the power to change conditions and provide a better life. This has been the experience of those who have dared to marry education and hard work with focus and determination.

My grandmother had a formal education that did not extend past the sixth grade. She did, however, earn a master's degree in struggle and a doctorate in faith. Her dream was that I would be the first college graduate in the family, and that my children would have their beginnings in a home that I owned, rather than in public housing, as had been the case for her and her children. She dreamed that when I entered rooms I would be respected for my thoughts and contributions, rather than to sweep and clean after the decision-makers had left. She dreamed that I would be judged not by the statistics that are frequently quoted in characterizing the African-American community, but instead by my ability to articulate my ideas and influence those around me. Most of all, she dreamed that the quality education that was not hers would be mine.

Hers was a simple, yet powerful, dream. It is only in describing education that the words "simple" and "powerful" can be used as complements. The concept of a quality education is simple and its result is powerful.

In many communities, however, the education is simple and the result is powerless. I have come to know and admire the courage and conviction of the parents in these communities. Their stories are part of the American dream and the dream that my grandmother had for me.

It is only in describing education that the words "simple" and "powerful" can be used as complements. The concept of a quality education is simple and its result is powerful.

As I listen to parents who have been written off and told that they do not care about their children, I cannot help but to think about how we have failed them. I listened to a mother named Arlene talk about how she pulled her son out of school for four months after he nearly failed the fourth grade. She then placed him in private school and soon received a report card that placed him on the honor roll. He had not attended school in four months, but he made the honor roll. The message is clear.

I listened to another parent, James, talk about his daughter, his only child, who was promoted to the fifth grade. But when she enrolled in a summer program at an area college, he learned that she was only reading at second grade levels. Yet she was consistently on the honor roll. James even pulled out the awards to prove it.

I listened to Lynn, a mother of a handicapped kindergartner, who told us about the special education committees that were held on the fourth floor of a building that was not handicapped accessible. When she asked why the meetings were held in this location, she was told that the running joke was that this would prevent parents from coming to the meetings and that if they did come, they would be too tired to ask questions.

Can you imagine? I had always been quick to react and lend a voice against acts of injustice and racism, yet I watched as hundreds of children entered chronically unprepared schools each day, and I said nothing. I watched as these schools, some of New York State's worst, stole promise, stole potential, and set children on a course of compromise, and I did nothing.

I was determined, however, to roll up my sleeves and work with the parents to insure that our children had access—not as a privilege, but as a right—to a quality education. This is what the entire charter school movement is about.

I listened to a very active mother, who leads not by words but by her own very powerful example. Veronica McClain told me how the district failed her two oldest children. She told me that she refused to lose her youngest, a bright and beautiful second grader, to low expectations.

I listened to Tanya, a woman grounded in faith and defined by her substance, share her dreams for her children and her desire to see the excellence that she demanded at home reinforced in the school.

I listened to Lonnie, a nurturing father whose strong and loving hands guide and protect his son with the care of an eagle protecting his nest, speaking of all things that his son would become. None was more celebrated than the term "graduate."

When I went home, I spoke with my wife about all the people I had met. She reminded me that there *are* good schools and a lot of committed teachers, and that I should not forget that. But in her own way, like the kindergarten teacher that she is, she told me exactly what was wrong with public education. Her explanation took the form of a fable:

"Once upon a time there was a little red hen who scratched about the barnyard until she uncovered some grains of wheat. She turned to the other workers on the farm and said, 'If we plant this wheat, we will have bread to eat and we will never go hungry again. Who will help me plant it?'
'We never did that before,' said the horse.
'I would need training,' said the pig.
'I have enough to do already,' said the goose.
'Well, I will do it myself,' said the little red hen, and she did.
'When the wheat grew tall and ripened into grain the little red hen asked, 'Who will reap the wheat?'
The horse responded, 'Let's check the regulations first.'
'I never learned how,' said the pig.
'It's not in my contract,' said the goose.
'Then I will do it myself,' said the little red hen, and she did.
At last, the time came to bake the bread.
'Who will help bake the bread?' asked the little red hen.
'Don't we need someone's permission to do that?' asked the horse.
'Can you pay me overtime for that?' asked the pig.
'It would not be fair if I were the only helper,' said the goose.

The little red hen then baked four loaves of bread, kept one for herself and shared the remaining loaves with the other animals.
Upon finishing the meal, the horse said, 'I am glad we thought of this!'
'Share and share alike,' said the pig.
'It just shows what happens when you cooperate,' said the goose.
The little red hen seemed to nod her head in agreement with all the comments of her fellow workers, but all the other animals wondered why the little red hen never asked to bake bread again."

My wife's story allowed my imagination to wander and speculate as to ***what could have been*** if the animals worked together toward the same goal. I wondered about what could happen if we all work together, never compromising on our commitment to our children. What if we had the strength and the moral conviction to simply reward success and remedy failure?

My wife's story also illustrated for me just how difficult it is to facilitate change, even when you're only baking bread.

I was determined, however, to roll up my sleeves and work with the parents to insure that our children had access—not as a privilege, but as a right—to a quality education. This is what the entire charter school movement is about. This is the only agenda that there is to advance. We must provide parents with choice and access to a quality education, regardless of income, race or street address.

Again, it is a simple, yet powerful, agenda, and one that is deeply rooted in the spirit and tradition of public education. Yet to many, it is viewed as dangerous, almost revolutionary. Parents taking control of their children's education, a community caring enough to bring about change, and children reaping the benefits, is considered dangerous.

We were determined to create a path, and we knew that in order to do that all we had to do was take a step forward. We organized our thoughts, and with the assistance of Jerry Vasquez and the New York State Charter School Resource Center, our thoughts became a framework complete with goals, benchmarks and meaningful expectations.

Within 10 days of our application being approved, we had already registered more than 850 students to fill 550 slots. We were a nonprofit entity with little to no track record, basically saying, "Here is our dream. Here is our vision. Will you join us?" More than 850 children said yes in a 10-day period.

It is a new day in public education and we have entered a new covenant with the community, and this time the covenant will not be broken.

The enrollment alone showed that the people closest to the problem saw this as a viable solution, and I believe that should have been all the justification that anyone needed. But it was not. The critics were loud and persistent. They protested "agenda setting." They wanted this community—this community that had finally found its voice, its will and its courage—silenced. But the parents came forward to remind the critics that this effort was not about money or agendas—it was about their children.

The critics stated that the charter had to be political because it came about so quickly. The media began to ask "Why the rush?" In fact, it became so ridiculously repetitive that my four-year old asked me, "Yeah Daddy, why the rush?"

I will tell you why. I grew up in Arbor Hill, and I am proud to say that. I went to church, my grandfather's church, around the corner from the Urban League. My grandmother's home—the home that I spent the bulk of my childhood in—is down the street from the charter school. My elementary school is around the corner from the charter school. *If growing up in Arbor Hill taught me anything, it taught me that you can grow old waiting for change.*

Change is not something that happens. It is not something that is created, it is something that is instituted. Some people spend their whole lives resisting change. There are organizations and movements that are dedicated to fighting change. Change never comes easily or voluntarily: if it did, there would not be Arbor Hills. Instead, it comes with a high price, one that few people are willing to pay, but one that every movement—every successful effort—demands.

Arbor Hill taught me why we cannot wait for change. It also taught me that it is easy to ask someone to wait if you are at a comfortable and convenient distance. It is easy to ask someone to wait and to put their life on hold, especially while *your* children attend blue ribbon schools and are preparing for their tomorrow today.

It is much harder to wait and watch your child become frustrated and give way to the temptations and the dangers that are at their fingertips. It is much harder to wait and know that with each passing minute, each passing hour, each passing day, your child becomes even more at risk of being kept permanently off track.

We argued that the process was not too quick: *it was too slow.* For too long we were told to wait and be patient while plans and piecemeal changes were made in education. Our time was now.

How can you travel through the schools in our community, the streets of Arbor Hill and the homes of our children, and not understand the urgency? This is a community that has constantly been told to wait, that "your time will come." *But it hasn't come.* How can you deny these children what you have valiantly fought to ensure that your children have access to?

New Covenant is more than a charter school, it is this community's school. It symbolizes the great things that can happen when we all decide to plant, reap, bake and break bread together. In that regard, it represents not only our hope for the future but the promise of today.

It is a new day in public education and we have entered a new covenant with the community, and this time the covenant will not be broken.

8

For additional information, contact the Manhattan Institute, 52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017
Telephone 212.599.7000 • Fax 212.599.3494 • E-mail holsen@manhattan-institute.org • www.manhattan-institute.org

Would you prefer to receive this publication via e-mail? If so please supply us with your e-mail address by contacting us at mi@manhattan-institute.org or 212-599-7000. Previous publications are also available.

Civic Reports

9	SCHOOL FINANCE REFORM: A CASE FOR VOUCHERS	MICHAEL HEISE & THOMAS NECHYBA
8	RIGHT-SIZING JUSTICE: A COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS OF IMPRISONMENT IN THREE STATES	ANNE MORRISON PIEHL, BERT USEEM & JOHN J. DIIULIO, JR.
7	'BROKEN WINDOWS' PROBATION: THE NEXT STEP IN FIGHTING CRIME	THE REINVENTING PROBATION COUNCIL
6	THE NEW YORK CITY TEACHERS' UNION CONTRACT: SHACKLING PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP	DALE BALLOU
5	DEBT & NEW YORK'S PUBLIC AUTHORITIES: BORROWING LIKE THERE'S NO TOMORROW	WILLIAM J. STERN
4	THE WHITMAN TAX CUTS: REAL GAINS FOR NEW JERSEY TAXPAYERS	TIMOTHY J. GOODSPEED
3	THE EFFECTS OF RENT DEREGULATION IN MASSACHUSETTS	HENRY O. POLLAKOWSKI

Civic Bulletins

22	ACHIEVEMENT AND OPPORTUNITY: KEYS TO QUALITY EDUCATION	JEB BUSH
21	NEIGHBORHOOD GUIDANCE OFFICES: A NEW MODEL FOR HELPING THE LESS FORTUNATE	RALPH NUNEZ
20	WHY SCHOOL VOUCHERS CAN HELP INNER-CITY CHILDREN	KURT SCHMOKE
19	TRANSFORMING AMERICAN EDUCATION	LISA GRAHAM KEEGAN
18	TRANSFORMING AMERICA'S CITIES	CLINT BOLICK
17	MAKING AMERICA'S CITIES GREAT PLACES TO LIVE	RUDOLPH GIULIANI
16	SAVING PUBLIC SCHOOLS	PAUL G. VALLAS

MANHATTAN INSTITUTE FOR POLICY RESEARCH
52 Vanderbilt Avenue • New York, NY 10017
www.manhattan-institute.org

Non-Profit
Organization
US Postage
PAID
Permit 04001
New York, NY

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title:
Charter schools in New York: A New Era

Author(s):

Corporate Source:

Publication Date:
August 1999

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Level 1

☑

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) *and* paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A

☐

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B

☐

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, → please

Signature: Michael Barreiro	Printed Name/Position/Title: Michael Barreiro, Chief of staff	
Organization/Address: The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, 52 Vanderbilt Avenue 2nd FL NY, NY 10017	Telephone: 212-599-7000	FAX: 212-599-3494
	E-Mail Address:	Date: 9.3.02

(over)

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, *or*, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education
Box 40, Teachers College
Columbia University
525 W. 120th Street, Main Hall 303
New York, NY 10027

Tel: 212-678-3433 / 800-601-4868
Fax: 212-678-4012

http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com

EFF-088 (Rev. 2/2000)